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Jātaka Stories and *Pacceka*buddhas in Early Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of *pacceka*buddhas in stories of the Buddha's past lives (*jātaka* tales) in early Buddhist narrative collections in Pāli and Sanskrit. In early Buddhism *pacceka*buddhas are liminal figures in two senses: they appear between Buddhist dispensations, and they are included as a category of awakening between *sammāsambuddha* and *arahat*. Because of their appearance in times of no Buddhism, *pacceka*buddhas feature regularly in *jātaka* literature, as exemplary renunciators, teachers, or recipients of gifts. This article asks what the liminal status of *pacceka*buddhas means for their interactions with the Buddha and his past lives as Bodhisatta.

KEYWORDS

Apadāna, Bodhisatta, Buddha, *jātaka*, *pacceka*buddha, *Sutta-nipāta*

Introduction

The last time I saw Lance Cousins was at the 2014 Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions in Manchester. At the time I was knee-deep in the complex story-network concerning kings called Janaka and Nimi and their renunciatory prowess.¹ I had headed off on a tangent exploring *pacceka*buddhas, since these apparently solitary renunciators feature large in such stories. I remember chatting with Lance over tea and a biscuit about the role of *pacceka*buddhas as a category and as a narrative device. I then had to set this area aside to complete work on my recent book, but I always wanted to come back to *pacceka*buddhas. Since this formed my last proper conversation with Lance, and since – like *pacceka*buddhas – he was both an

¹ Eventually published as chapter 6 of Appleton 2017.

accomplished meditator and a stimulating teacher,² it seemed an appropriate topic to address in this memorial volume.

The term *paccekabuddha* (or, in Sanskrit *pratyekabuddha*) is usually translated as ‘solitary Buddha’ or ‘lone Buddha’.³ Such figures are said to arise in times between Buddhist dispensations, achieve awakening without access to teachings, and pursue a life of solitary renunciation: they ‘wander lonely as a rhinoceros,’ as the famous *Sutta-nipāta* verses put it.⁴ They are liminal figures in more than one sense: Not only do they appear between *buddhas*, but they are positioned between *buddhas* and *arahats* in the enumeration of types of awakening, realising the truth themselves (like full *buddhas*) but not going on to found a Buddhist dispensation or monastic lineage. Because of their association with past times before the *Dhamma* was made available by the most recent Buddha, *paccekabuddhas* feature most prominently in *jātaka* and *apadāna* literature. In *jātaka* stories in particular their liminality comes to the fore, as they interact with the Bodhisatta in stories told by the Buddha. In such stories we find much more than silence and solitude: *paccekabuddhas* often gather in groups, sometimes bound by past-life friendship; they teach others, including the Bodhisatta, often through enigmatic verses, metaphors or images; and they offer a model of renunciation fit for the distant past, before the monasticism instituted by the Buddha.

In this paper I will explore the role of *paccekabuddhas* in *jātaka* literature, with a particular focus on the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*, but also making reference to *jātakas* in the *Apadāna*, *Avadānaśataka*, and *Mahāvastu*. I will also make some comparative comments about the non-*jātaka* occurrences of *paccekabuddhas* in the *Sutta-nipāta* commentary. The article will address the following question: What does the positioning of *paccekabuddhas* as interim figures, appearing as they do between the dispensations of full *buddhas*, mean for their relationship with the most recent Buddha or his past lives as Bodhisatta? I will start by considering stories in which *paccekabuddhas* appear as generic best renouncers or best recipients of gifts in the

² I was lucky enough to benefit from Lance’s Pāli teaching, both formally during my DPhil at the University of Oxford, and informally at his home, where Sarah Shaw and I spent many a happy afternoon reading *jātakas* with him. On *paccekabuddhas* as teachers see Appleton forthcoming.

³ Since I am primarily exploring Pāli sources I will tend to use Pāli terms except when explicitly referring to a Sanskrit text. I prefer to use *paccekabuddha* rather than the standard translation ‘solitary Buddha’, as in narrative occurrences *paccekabuddhas* are often *not* solitary. Leaving the term untranslated has the potential to mislead, however, since Norman (1983) has convincingly argued that the term may originally have been related to *pratyaya-buddha* and meant something like ‘awakened by signs’. If pressed, I would translate as ‘independent Buddha’.

⁴ Sn 35-75. On why the reference should be to a rhinoceros and not his horn see Jones 2014. For a translation and study of the verses and commentarial stories associated with *paccekabuddhas* see Kloppenborg 1974.

times between Buddhisms, as well as the karmic rewards of serving such figures. Next I will explore stories in which *paccekabuddhas* assist or teach the Bodhisatta, asking what this tells us about the various spiritual and social hierarchies exposed in *jātaka* literature. This will lead on to some concluding thoughts about how the *paccekabuddha* serves to both undermine and reinforce the status of Bodhisatta and Buddha in *jātaka* stories.

The *paccekabuddha* as interim figure

In a recent article in *Artibus Asiae*, Samerchai Poolsuwan (2016) explores the iconography of *paccekabuddhas* in a range of Pagan sites from around the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, and demonstrates that *paccekabuddha* images often represent the intermediate time between past and present – or present and future – *buddhas*. As such they are depicted in careful relation to, for example, the twenty-eight *buddhas* of the *Buddhavaṃsa*, or events in the life of the next *buddha*, Metteya. Poolsuwan further argues that they may be iconographically intermediate too, being depicted with some of the iconography of full *buddhas* but not all, marking them out as somewhere between a *buddha* and an *arahat*.⁵

As Poolsuwan rightly notes, one of the main associations with *paccekabuddhas* is their position between *buddhas*, and between the *buddha* and his awakened disciples. As such, *paccekabuddhas* occupy a liminal space. This liminal role is particularly apparent in the narrative universe of *jātaka* stories, in which neither a full *buddha* nor any *arahats* can exist. As such, *paccekabuddhas* often feature as a substitute for these other forms of awakened being, either as a generic ‘best field of merit’ or as ‘best renouncer’. We will therefore begin our examination of *paccekabuddhas* in the *jātakas* with these two functions of these independent renouncers.

In a famous story found in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* (40) and the *Jātakamālā* (4), the Bodhisatta sees a *paccekabuddha* and decides to offer him a gift, but Māra creates a vision of a hell pit that he must traverse if he is to succeed in his intentions, and declares that gift-giving leads to hell. The virtuous donor, of course, sets out in any case to make his offering, and miraculous lotus-flowers appear beneath his feet as stepping-stones.⁶ This is the only real occurrence of a *paccekabuddha* in the *Jātakamālā*, and his role is simply to demonstrate the Buddha-to-be’s commitment to almsgiving. The importance of giving alms is also the focus of the *Dhajaviheṭṭha-*

⁵ It is noted that his arguments on this point are disputed by other scholars, and it is possible that the images he sees as *paccekabuddhas* are actually *arahats*.

⁶ A similar tale is found twice in the *Mahāvastu* (III, 41-7 and III, 250-54) though there the potential recipient is not named, and the tester is the god Śakra rather than Māra.

jātaka (Ja 391), though it is addressed through slightly different means: A false ascetic causes a king to stop supporting ascetics, and the god Sakka (the Bodhisatta) is forced to intervene to teach the king about the importance of venerating ascetics, using an old *paccekabuddha* as an example of a good recipient. In the *Āditta-jātaka* (Ja 424), *paccekabuddhas* themselves highlight the importance of gift giving, in a teaching given after they accept alms from King Bharata (the Bodhisatta) and his queen.

The idea that *paccekabuddhas* are the best available recipients is further highlighted in the *Dasabrāhmaṇa-jātaka* (Ja 495) in which King Yudhiṭṭhira consults his wise counsellor Vidhura (the Bodhisatta) about the qualities of brahmins. After a number of verses about those who are brahmins in name only, the king wishes to invite only ‘true’ brahmins to an almsgiving, and so they invite five hundred *paccekabuddhas*. Thus the story shows characters famous from the Brahmanical epic *Mahābhārata* acknowledging the Buddhist perspective on who makes the best recipient. In the very next story, the *Bhikkhāparampara-jātaka* (Ja 496), a king travels through his land with his brahmin chaplain in disguise, trying to find out if he is deficient in virtue. Upon receiving a gift of some food, he gives it to his brahmin chaplain, who gives it to an ascetic, who gives it to character identified in the verses as a *bhikkhu*. This term, which literally means ‘one who lives by alms’, usually refers to a monk, but is explained in the prose as here referring to a *paccekabuddha*. The discrepancy between verse and commentarial prose (which is itself reasonably common in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*) serves to highlight the use of *paccekabuddhas* in this story as a simple substitute for a monk in a time when no Buddhist monasticism is in existence. Indeed, the appearance of a *paccekabuddha* is often described as similar to a monk, for example they wear orange robes, further blurring the lines. That a person with such an appearance is widely trusted is an important narrative device in two further *jātakas*, in which someone takes on a disguise as a *paccekabuddha* in order to catch and kill an elephant (Ja 221 and 514).

The worthiness of *paccekabuddhas* as recipients is reinforced by the karmic rewards of serving them, and this is another common theme in *jātaka* literature, as also in *apadāna/avadāna* literature. For example, in the *Kummāsapiṇḍa-jātaka* (Ja 415), a poor man (the Bodhisatta) gives four handfuls of food to four *paccekabuddhas*, and as a result is reborn as a king. In the *Mahāpanāda-jātaka* and *Suruci-jātaka* (Ja 264 and 489), a father and son build a shelter for a *paccekabuddha* and reap impressive karmic rewards including rebirth as a king. Karmic rewards can even fruit within a single lifetime: In the *Samkha-jātaka* (Ja 442) the brahmin Saṅkha (the Bodhisatta) is very generous and decides to go to sea to get more wealth to give away. A *paccekabuddha* sees that he will run into trouble and so appears before him to give him a merit-making opportunity. Saṅkha duly gives him his own sandals and a sunshade, as a

result of which, when his ship is destroyed, he and his attendant survive and swim for seven days until the goddess Maṇimekhalā rescues them; she declares them worthy of rescue because of the gift Saṅkha made to the *paccekabuddha*.

Bad karmic interactions are also possible, as are mixed ones. In the *Mayhaka-jātaka* (Ja 390) we discover that the reason a rich merchant cannot enjoy his wealth is because in a past life he gave a gift to a *paccekabuddha* but was too miserly to rejoice in it. An episode of the *Kuṇāla-jātaka* (Ja 536) records that a woman's ugly face but soft skin is due to having given a gift to a *paccekabuddha* but in anger. In a little interlude of the *Kusa-jātaka* (Ja 531, with a parallel in *Mahāvastu* III, 27) we find the karmic cause of the ugliness of King Kusa (the Bodhisatta) and the reason he is despised by his wife: in a past life she had given away his portion of food to a *paccekabuddha* and he had become angry and taken it back.

As we can see, the Bodhisatta is far from exempt from these karmicly potent encounters with *paccekabuddhas*, and this is particularly true of Pāli literature.⁷ Perhaps the most interesting examples appear in the *Pubbakammapiloti* chapter of the *Apadāna*, which, despite being about the Buddha, is tucked in with the verses of the *theras* (Ap 299-301). In this intriguing text we hear of past-life misdeeds that the Bodhisatta committed, and how these explain various minor sufferings in the Buddha's final life.⁸ Several of these misdeeds involve *paccekabuddhas*: the Bodhisatta slanders a *paccekabuddha* (verse 4), throws a clod of earth at a *paccekabuddha* (verse 17), and attacks a *paccekabuddha* with an elephant (verse 19). All of these actions of course have bad karmic results, both in hell realms and in his final life, in which the Buddha was slandered and subject to attacks from Devadatta, including an attack with an elephant. Poetic justice abounds in the *Apadāna*.

Paccekabuddhas supporting or teaching the Bodhisatta

In addition to providing a powerful field of merit (or demerit) and serving as ideal recipient of gifts, *paccekabuddhas* in the *jātakas* often function as teachers or exemplary renouncers, frequently encouraging the Bodhisatta to give up his

⁷ Sanskrit narrative literature also records plenty of stories of karmicly potent encounters with *pratyekabuddhas*, though the Buddha-to-be rarely features. In the *Mahāvastu*, for example, past-life service of *pratyekabuddhas* explains why Ājñāta Kauṇḍinya was first to understand the *Dharma*, and why Yaśoda mastered the powers so quickly. The only encounter between the Buddha-to-be and a *pratyekabuddha*, however, is in a past-life episode within the *Kuśa-jātaka*, discussed above. In the *Avadānaśataka* there are plenty of encounters with *pratyekabuddhas*, but none of them feature the Buddha-to-be.

⁸ For a helpful study of this text see Walters 1990.

worldly attachments.⁹ Perhaps the most famous of such stories, and the one that initially prompted my interest in the whole category of *paccekabuddhas*, is the story of the four *paccekabuddha*-kings and the potter, found in the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* (Ja 408). In this tale, the Bodhisatta is a potter, and he and his wife are visited by four *paccekabuddhas* who used to be famous kings. The potter asks them how they came to be *paccekabuddhas* and they explain in a verse each. These verses speak of signs or experiences that led to renunciation, such as seeing a mango tree stripped bare, or hawks fighting over a piece of meat. The theme, of course, is the perils of worldly life and the benefits of renunciation. After hearing them, the potter decides to become a renouncer himself, but his wife – also inspired – beats him to it and leaves him to care for their children. Only once the children are old enough to fend for themselves is the Bodhisatta-potter able to fulfill his ambition.

This story is important for several reasons. First, it draws our attention to a key theme with which *paccekabuddhas* are often associated, namely seeing signs that lead to renunciation. Secondly, it shows how their means of learning – through direct experience or reflection on a powerful image – becomes their means of inspiring or teaching others, either through recounting their own encounters as here, or concocting new ones for their audiences, as in other narratives. Thirdly, it shows that this lesson about the benefits of renunciation is suitable for all audiences, not just royalty, and not just men. And one of the most common audiences for their teachings about renunciation in the *jātakas* is the Bodhisatta, in whatever form he happens to have taken birth.

Often the *paccekabuddhas* that teach the Bodhisatta turn out to be old friends. In the *Darīmukha-jātaka* (Ja 378), for example, while relaxing in a park the young brahmin Darīmukha realises that his friend – the Bodhisatta – is about to become king and that he himself is likely to be appointed as the commander of the army. Deciding that he prefers renunciation he hides himself at the key moment, when the people come to invite the Bodhisatta to be king. After the Bodhisatta has accepted their invitation and been taken off to the palace, Darīmukha emerges from the shadows, sits on the empty royal bench, and sees a withered leaf fall to the ground. At once he realises *paccekabodhi*, magically assumes the appearance of a renouncer, and flies off to the Himalayas. After forty years of being infatuated with the glories of kingship, the king recalls his former friend and conceives a desire to see him. Eventually the *paccekabuddha* Darīmukha decides it is time to visit, to encourage the king to renounce now that he is older and has many descendants to continue the line. The king, though pleased to see his former friend, takes some persuading before he is willing to detach himself from his worldly life, but he does

⁹ For a more extensive study of the content and methods of *paccekabuddha* teachers in Pāli literature see Appleton [forthcoming](#).

eventually renounce. Of course, as he is the Bodhisatta he cannot achieve *paccekabodhi* like his friend, but he does achieve a heavenly rebirth as a result of his efforts.

A closely related story is the *Sonaka-jātaka* (Ja 529), in which the Bodhisatta, called Arindama, becomes king and his friend Sonaka becomes a renouncer.¹⁰ As in the *Darimukha-jātaka*, Sonaka achieves *paccekabodhi* as a result of seeing a withered leaf, that classic sign of impermanence, and immediately disappears off to the Himalayas. When the king much later wants to see him, Sonaka visits and offers some potent teachings, including outlining the eight blessings of being a renouncer (*samaṇa*), which are all benefits of non-attachment, such as remaining dispassionate even if one's city were to burn down. When the king remains unconvinced, Sonaka tells him the famous parable of a crow who is so greedy that he gets stuck inside an elephant carcass, busily eating away as the hide shrinks in the sun.

In these two stories the aim of the *paccekabuddha's* teaching is to persuade the Bodhisatta-king of the need to renounce, but sometimes the teachings are about other related ideals, particularly the need for control of the senses and avoidance of various kinds of attachment. Thus, in the *Telpatta-jātaka* (Ja 96, see also Ja 132) the Bodhisatta-prince seeks a kingship across the other side of a wilderness, and some *paccekabuddhas* counsel him to be careful, as the wilderness is populated by demonesses who ensnare men's senses then eat them. The Bodhisatta sets off with five companions, each of whom falls foul of the demonesses' efforts, whether soft couches, beautiful music, sweet foods, enticing perfumes or seductive forms. Only the Bodhisatta has full control of all his senses, and his reward is to reach the other side in safety and gain a kingship. Having *paccekabuddhas* as your advisors turns out to be very beneficial.

It is fitting that kings should so often be the beneficiaries of the teachings of *paccekabuddhas*, since they are their polar opposites, being so dominated by worldly pleasures and attachments. Perhaps for the same reason, it is also very often kings that *become* such accomplished renouncers, though this is by no means always the case. In the *Pāṇiya-jātaka* (Ja 459), five householders each commit and then reflect upon a misdeed, and this leads to their renunciation and *paccekabodhi*. Later they recount their experiences to the Bodhisatta, who is a king. Their misdeeds are not severe: the first stole water from a friend, the second felt lust towards another man's wife, the third told a lie in order to save his own life, the fourth permitted slaughter of animals for sacrifice, and the fifth allowed the consumption of strong drink at a festival, which led to fights and injuries. Once again the Bodhisatta-as-king is able to benefit from the teachings of these *paccekabuddhas*, realising that

¹⁰ See also *Mahāvastu* III, 449-61 for a parallel story, though in this version the renouncer is not said to be a *pratyekabuddha*.

unwholesome desires lead to bad behaviour and deciding to renounce as well. Although the verses are recounted in a manner reminiscent of the four *paccekabuddha*-kings, the themes are rather different: these *paccekabuddhas* demonstrate that renunciation as a way to avoid bad deeds by cultivating non-attachment, whereas the *paccekabuddha*-kings reflect on the inevitable destruction of worldly wealth or the benefits of solitude. However, the end result is the same, with the Bodhisatta in both cases becoming a renouncer.

Even when he is already a renouncer, the Bodhisatta can benefit from the teachings of *paccekabuddhas*. In the *Pañcuposatha-jātaka* (Ja 490) the Bodhisatta is a brahmin sage who is afflicted with an excess of pride, which is, of course, a form of attachment. Four animals that live near him each wrestle with a different form of attachment: a pigeon vows to overcome his passion for his mate after she is eaten by a hawk, a snake vows to overcome the anger that led him to kill a bull, a jackal vows to overcome his greed after escaping an elephant carcass in which he has been trapped for a long time, and a bear vows to overcome greed that has led to him being attacked by villagers. All four decide to observe the holy day (*uposatha*). Meanwhile a *paccekabuddha* sees the Bodhisatta-sage's pride and deliberately comes to sit on his seat, making him angry. The *paccekabuddha* rebukes the sage for his pride, and – in a rather unusual passage for the *jātakas* – tells him that he will become a full *buddha*, and that such proud behaviour is unworthy of him. Despite this prediction and admonition, the sage remains silent, refusing even to pay respects to his visitor. Finally, the *paccekabuddha* shocks the sage by flying into the air, and all of a sudden the Bodhisatta realises what an opportunity he has missed as a result of his pride. He reflects on this and finally achieves the meditative attainments. He and the animals then exchange verses about their experiences, and we learn that pride, along with other forms of attachment such as greed, passion and anger, should be overcome.

In addition to showing how the Bodhisatta benefits from the teachings of a *paccekabuddha*, this story reminds us of the question of hierarchy. In relation to the proud brahmin sage, the *paccekabuddha* is superior, yet the proud brahmin sage is himself set to become a full *buddha*, clearly superior to a *paccekabuddha*. As a Bodhisatta, however, he cannot attain *paccekabodhi*, and so even after he has overcome his pride, all he achieves is a range of meditative attainments and a rebirth in the Brahmā realm. We might reasonably ask which of the two characters – the Bodhisatta-sage or the *paccekabuddha* – is the superior 'hero' of the story. This same question arises, though it is less directly addressed, in all the other stories in which the Bodhisatta is taught or encouraged to renounce by a *paccekabuddha*, for although he may follow their recommendations, he can never equal their attainments.

A Bodhisatta cannot be a *paccekabuddha*

The questions of spiritual hierarchy that arise in these stories are avoided in the many commentarial tales that accompany the rhinoceros horn verses of the *Sutta-nipāta* (Pj II 52-130). In this collection we find numerous stories in which kings are inspired by *paccekabuddhas* into renouncing and attaining *paccekabodhi* themselves, thereby equaling the attainment of their teachers, who are often said to have been their friends in past lives. The tricky thing for the *jātaka* genre, in contrast to the *Sutta-nipāta* commentary, is that a character has to be identified as the Bodhisatta, and the Bodhisatta cannot – by definition – achieve any form of awakening until his final life as a *buddha*. Evidence that the decision over which character ought to be identified as the Bodhisatta is not always straightforward is found in one of the most interesting stories that is associated with *paccekabuddhas*, the *Mahājanaka-jātaka* (Ja 539).

In the *Mahājanaka-jātaka*, the hero and namesake of the story is a prince and then king called Mahājanaka, or simply Janaka. As a boy, he grows up in a neighbouring city after his father, the king of Mithilā, is killed and ousted by his uncle. After an adventurous sea-voyage, the young Janaka ends up in the royal park of Mithilā just as the magical state chariot is set free to seek a new ruler, Janaka's uncle having died without a son. Unsurprisingly the magical chariot approaches Janaka and stops beside him. Having inspected the young man, the brahmins invite him to be ruler, and he is taken to the palace, where he further proves his worth by winning over the princess (his cousin Sīvalī) and solving riddles left by his uncle. It is in these riddles that we get our first indication that *paccekabuddhas* are important in this story. One part of the riddle says that treasure can be found at the sunrise and at the sunset. Janaka works out that this must mean the places where the previous king received and took leave of *paccekabuddhas*, since these glorious figures are like the sun, and indeed treasure is found buried in these places.

These worthy renouncers are referred to again later in the story, both explicitly and implicitly. After a happy time as ruler, supporting *paccekabuddhas*, married to Sīvalī and with a son and heir, Janaka one day decides to visit his pleasure park. On his way into the park he sees a mango tree bursting with ripe fruits, and he picks and eats a mango. Seeing this, all the members of his retinue follow suit, stripping the tree bare and breaking its branches. On his way home, the king sees this sorry looking tree, and next to it a fruitless tree that has remained lush and unharmed. Just as *paccekabuddhas* seem commonly to do, Janaka reflects that the kingship is like the fruiting tree, and wishes to become like the barren tree. When he returns to his palace, he hands over his state duties and lives on the roof

terrace as a renouncer. This is not enough for him, however, and he reflects on those *paccekabuddhas* he has supported and wonders where he might find their good example and teachings now. Having got hold of a robe and bowl he shaves his head and descends the stairs in pursuit of proper renunciation. On the way down the stairs he meets his wife, and she mistakes him for a *paccekabuddha*.

There are no more explicit references to *paccekabuddhas* after this in the text, but what happens next continues to remind us of those characters. Not only does Janaka seek a particularly solitary form of renunciation, he declares that he has no teachers other than the mango trees, and speaks a famous verse about his detachment from his city, stating that even if Mithilā was on fire, nothing of his would be burning. Janaka also uses a variety of other images to try to persuade his wife to stop following him, images that are reminiscent of those often encountered by *paccekabuddhas*: a girl with two bracelets on one arm jangling annoyingly and a single bracelet on the other arm silent as a sage; a fletcher who shuts one eye in order to make his arrow straight; a plucked blade of grass unable to be rejoined to its plant.

What these various elements of the story suggest is that Janaka was once considered a *paccekabuddha*, yet in this story he is identified as the Bodhisatta. As such, all he achieves, after finally embarking on the solitary renunciation he so strongly insists upon, is a heavenly rebirth; his wife achieves the same, after a more modest form of renunciation in the royal gardens. That the identification of Janaka as the Bodhisatta and the concomitant restriction on his ‘happy ending’ was a change made to an existing story is supported by the wider story-cycle of kings of Mithilā famous for their renunciatory prowess. Such kings, who include those called Janaka, Nimi and Nami, are associated with awakening through signs, pursuing solitary renunciation, and expressing their detachment through a verse about their burning city. This verse is found associated with a King Janaka in the *Mahābhārata* (12.17.18, 12.171.56, and 12.268.4), and with a King Nami in the Jain *Uttarajjhāyā* (9.14). Elsewhere in the *Uttarajjhāyā* (18.45-47) King Nami is one of a group of four kings who renounce and achieve liberation after seeing a sign, in a parallel story to that of the four *paccekabuddha*-kings in the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka* examined above. In the *Nimi-jātaka* (Ja 541, see also Ja 9) the king of Mithilā may not be associated with *paccekabuddhas*, but he does renounce after seeing a sign – his first grey hair.¹¹

What do we learn from this network of stories, and from the various references to and associations with *paccekabuddhas* in the *Mahājanaka-jātaka*? We learn that sometimes the generic conventions of the *jātaka* genre likely over-ruled previous associations with narrative characters, even when such characters were

¹¹ For a full discussion of this network of stories see Appleton 2017, chapter 6.

famous for their attainments. Indeed, it is precisely because Janaka was already a well-known royal renouncer that he had to be claimed as the Bodhisatta. The result, however, is that this famous renouncer can only renounce, and not achieve the liberation that his counterparts in Jain narrative and Hindu epic are said to achieve. We return once again to the question of the relative hierarchy of *paccekabuddha* and Bodhisatta.

A question of hierarchy: *paccekabuddha*, Bodhisatta and Buddha

Despite his heroic efforts and impressive achievements, as in all the other stories in which the Bodhisatta is inspired by *paccekabuddhas*, Janaka is inferior to these awakened beings. This sense of relative hierarchy is sometimes emphasized, for example in the *Gaṅgamāla-jātaka* (Ja 421), the Bodhisatta is King Udaya and his barber, Gaṅgamāla, renounces and becomes a *paccekabuddha*. When he returns to visit the king he uses a familiar form of address to greet him, and the king's mother and others are cross that he is not properly subservient. The Bodhisatta has to intervene and explain the merits of a *paccekabuddha* to his ignorant relations. Here, then, it is clear that a *paccekabuddha*-barber is superior to a Bodhisatta-king. However, the message is perhaps more to do with another important hierarchy: spiritual attainments trump social or caste rank.

A rather different answer to the question of hierarchy is found in the *Mahāmora-jātaka* (Ja 491), in which the Bodhisatta is a golden peacock who lives a holy life in the Himalayas. Nobody can catch him because of his holiness and protective chants. Eventually a hunter trains a peahen, and ensnares the peacock through lust. However, they then talk, and the peacock teaches the hunter such that he becomes a *paccekabuddha*. Despite this attainment he does not know how he can free all the birds he has left in bondage back at his home, and it takes the Bodhisatta – who is explicitly said in the commentary to be more knowledgeable than a *paccekabuddha* – to advise an Act of Truth. Thus the *paccekabuddha* declares the truth of his attainment, and through that all the creatures are freed. And while he too is freed, from the bondage of *saṃsāra*, he remains in at least one respect inferior to the Bodhisatta-peacock.

While there may be more than one perspective on whether *paccekabuddha* or Bodhisatta is superior, it is clear that the Buddha is definitely superior to *paccekabuddhas*, and in this certainty is found another solution to the question of hierarchy. In a series of verses in the *Apadāna* (I 7-14) the Buddha tells his disciple Ānanda how *paccekabuddhas* came to achieve awakening. He explains that they served former *buddhas* but did not achieve awakening in that time. This explanation neatly places the agency back in the hands of the Buddha again, making

paccekabuddhas dependent on *buddhas* in a similar manner to *arahats*. Rather than being entirely independent and accomplished renouncers, *paccekabuddhas* are then said to achieve awakening without a teacher because they already had a teacher in a past life, and that teacher was a full *buddha*. However, this explanation appears only to have developed *after* the proliferation of stories about *paccekabuddhas*. I have not found any *jātaka* stories that tell of the past-lives of *paccekabuddhas*, who are instead associated with immediate and present awakening, in a manner that bypasses the teachings of a full *buddha*.

The *Apadāna*'s explanation of how *paccekabuddhas* sow the seeds of their achievements in past lives is, of course, broadly in line with *apadāna/avadāna* conceptions of awakening in general. In the same text, elder monks and nuns are said to have sowed the seeds of arahatship by serving past *buddhas* or, indeed, past *paccekabuddhas*. The Buddha himself is also said to have served past *buddhas* but not achieved awakening during that time. In the *Avadānaśataka* a chapter of ten stories (21–30) recounts how people become *pratyekabuddhas* after an act of service to – and prediction by – a *buddha*, though in most of these stories the *buddha* is the one of the present age, and the achievement will happen in a future time. We also find a similar theme in the *Sutta-nipāta* commentary, where the stories associated with eight of the verses tell of past lives of *paccekabuddhas* in the time of Buddha Kassapa, but here the focus is less on their prior achievements and more on their karmic bonds: their fellowship as a part of Kassapa's community leads to them coming together again once they have become *paccekabuddhas*, and helping any remaining member of their group to achieve that same end.¹²

These intricate networks of vows, predictions, service, achievements, and lateral karmic bonds are characteristic of the *apadāna/avadāna* genre, and, as we have seen, *paccekabuddhas* feature as recipients of karmically significant acts of service as well as having past-life stories of their own. However, *jātaka* stories – in contrast to *apadānas/avadānas*, tend to emphasize the former of these two positions, portraying *paccekabuddhas* as figures that are solitary in the sense of being independent, awakened by and for themselves, in a time when the teachings of *buddhas* are not known. Theirs is a very direct form of awakening, based on personal experience, and not dependent on learning or formal monastic training. It is no wonder, then, that the question of their value relative to the Buddha became rather important.

¹² Such multi-life group bonds appear in the stories associated with verses 38, 42, 47 and 58, while those associated with verses 36 and 39 simply imply that the *paccekabuddha* sowed the seeds in his past life, and the story that accompanies verses 45 and 46 explores how past-life affection can make it hard to achieve awakening.

These varying perspectives within Buddhist narrative sources are echoed by scholarly debates around the status of *paccekabuddhas*. Many scholars have argued that the character of the *paccekabuddha* allows for the inclusion of non-Buddhist (or pre-Buddhist) ascetics into the Buddhist fold.¹³ Certainly in *jātaka* literature, as we have seen, *paccekabuddhas* often feature as generic renouncers in a time when no monks or *buddhas* can appear, and they offer a form of awakening that appears independent of learning or institutions. Indeed, Janaka and Nimi/Nami appear to be renouncer kings of particularly legendary status, and the fact that they – and the overall concept of a *paccekabuddha* – are shared with Jainism suggests a likely pre-Buddhist background. However, whatever its origins it is clear that the category entered Buddhism early, and took root in various different ways. For this reason, amongst others, it is important to consider the different understandings of *paccekabuddhas* across different genres and different schools, for the notion changed as Buddhist traditions developed and spread.

The distinction between the portrayal of *paccekabuddhas* in *jātaka* literature and their position in *apadāna/avadāna* literature, as discussed here, demonstrates the fruitfulness of such an approach. The differences between these genres' portrayal of *paccekabuddhas* suggest that efforts were made to subordinate these remarkably independent renouncers, by codifying their attainments in relation to past life encounters with *buddhas*. This careful positioning of *paccekabuddhas* as dependent on the Buddha should not, however, stop us from appreciating their unique position within stories of the Buddha's past lives, where they maintain much of their independence, and yet behave according to – and teach – an entirely Buddhist understanding of the world.

Conclusion

I began this paper with the following question: What does the positioning of *paccekabuddhas* as interim figures, appearing as they do between the dispensations of full *buddhas*, mean for their relationship with the most recent Buddha or his past lives as Bodhisatta? As we have seen, this interim positioning allows *paccekabuddhas* to fill a narrative gap in *jātaka* literature, which is almost always situated in a time between Buddhisms, by serving as 'best renouncers' or 'most powerful fields of (de-)merit'. In these roles *paccekabuddhas* are not particularly distinctive, and indeed they are often described as looking rather like Buddhist monks. More distinctive is their role in teaching the Bodhisatta about the benefits of renunciation or non-

¹³ For example this view is broadly shared, with some variation, by Gombrich 1979, Katz 1982, Kloppenborg 1974, Fujita 1985, Norman 1983, while Ray (1994) has suggested that they represent a form of early Buddhist 'saint', and Wiltshire (1990) argued that they are proto-*śramaṇas*.

attachment. By recounting their own powerful experiences of confronting impermanence or the defiling power of desire, or by offering a parable or other illustration, *paccekabuddhas* provide a teaching and example for the Buddha-to-be to follow.

In these Bodhisatta-*paccekabuddha* encounters, the Bodhisatta often appears inferior, requesting and receiving teachings, struggling to overcome his worldly ties or social pride. The Bodhisatta often aspires to be like a *paccekabuddha*, following his example through renouncing the world. However, because of the restrictions of the *jātaka* genre, the Bodhisatta can never equal the attainments of his teacher, managing only to achieve successful renunciation, meditative attainments, and a heavenly rebirth. Alternatively, if the compilers felt the need to identify a truly heroic legendary king-become-*paccekabuddha* as the Bodhisatta, the association with *paccekabodhi* was necessarily pushed to the sidelines.

The superiority of these independent renouncers over the heroic Buddha-to-be is challenged by the development of the *apadāna/avadāna* notion of intricate karmic networks. We discover that *paccekabuddhas*, like *arahats* and full *buddhas*, all planted the seeds of this attainment through an act of service towards a *buddha* in the past. These vast networks of karmically potent encounters between awakened beings of all types and stages allows the Buddha – and other full *buddhas* – to regain centre-stage, yet *paccekabuddhas* feature as fields of merit as well as as characters with a past-life encounter of their own. This closes the circle, bringing us back to those *jātaka* stories in which *paccekabuddhas* provide an opportunity for the Bodhisatta to make merit or demerit on his long path to buddhahood.

To conclude, *paccekabuddhas* seem always to be in the space in between two more established categories. Just as they are positioned between full *buddhas* and *arahats*, they also appear between Buddhist dispensations. They are powerful fields of merit, but their attainment ultimately came to be considered as dependent on encounters with even more powerful fields of merit. They teach but they cannot be seen to be teaching lest they threaten the authority of the Buddha and his dispensation. They help the Bodhisatta, and remain superior to him in most instances, yet their inferiority to the Buddha is clear to see. Contrary to their reputation, *paccekabuddhas* are neither solitary nor silent, but rather it is their possible independence from the Buddhist dispensation that makes them so interesting.

Abbreviations

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| Ap | <i>Apadāna</i> |
| Ja | <i>Jātakatthavaṇṇanā</i> |

Sn *Sutta-nipāta*
Pj *Paramattha-jotikā* containing *Sutta-nipāta* commentary

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